

Duxbury Field Notes

By FAHY BYGATE

After raining for what seemed like weeks, I took advantage of a rare break in the showers and walked down the back road of the beach last week. The dreary weather and threatening skies kept away only those of us crazy enough or with the worst cabin fever to venture out. The air smelled of the sea and there were plenty of birds around. I was stalking a Yellow Warbler near



High Pines when a car pulled up and asked me if the "coyote" was stalking me. I turned around to see what seemed to be a young coyote trotting along the edge of the beach on my right.

The car left and I stopped behind a large pole and watched to see if the animal would walk opposite me or turn around. It had seen me, of that I was sure, and was wary but not frightened. It trotted a few steps, stopped, looked at me and then continued down the beach. It looked healthy and purposeful. It passed me, crossed through the beach grass to the road and disappeared into the dunes toward the ocean. Later, a woman with two small children drove by from the opposite direction. She had seen the coyote and stopped to discuss the pros and cons of having coyotes running around our neighborhoods. She was fearful for the children and her pets.

A few years ago, I went to a lecture on Cape Cod about the increase in coyotes in Massachusetts. The meeting was called because residents in the area were both worried and curious about these animals. An expert in the subject talked to us frankly, knowing full well that most of the audience wished that coyotes would go away and that they never have to be confronted with one. Coyotes, the man explained, are losing their natural habitat, just like every other creature except man. Why they are losing their centuries-old place on earth is precisely because of that other creature, man. Their habitat is rapidly being converted from woods and scrub to cement and suburban housing. Coyotes, in their effort to adapt, move on to the next best thing: our back yards.

Coyotes are wild animals and that is the most necessary thing to learn about them. This means that they are always looking for food and will do what they can to eat. If this means snatching a kitten or a small dog from a backyard at night, they most certainly will do that. Keeping pets indoors will prevent a family tragedy. Don't leave trash or garbage where a coyote can find it and never willingly feed a coyote. Feeding coyotes will attract more of them.

Apart from that, the best plan is to learn to live with them. Coyotes are no different from skunks or raccoons or squirrels. They don't want to attack a human and will avoid you if possible, but they are also curious animals and might come quite close to people to investigate. Any quick noise or motion will probably drive them away. I have walked several times with a coyote nearby and have never seen the animal exhibit anything except a very wary curiosity. As with any wild animal, be on your guard, do not try to attract them with food, etc and accept them as part of the natural life around you. You could even try enjoying a species that has lived among man for centuries. As with all of the creatures of this earth, coyotes do not need a reason to be here. Like man, they just are.